

NORSTRILIAN NEWS

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MAGAZINE NEWS:: GALAXY goes bimonthly with the August-September 1970 issue, the contents of which are - "The Day After Judgment" (James Blish), "I Will Fear No Evil (Part II)" (Robert A. Heinlein), "About A Secret Crocodile" (R.A. Lafferty), "Power Play" (Dannie Plachta) and "Moonheat" (Ernest Taves). The contents of WORLDS OF FANTASY no. 2: "Long Live Lord Kor!" (Andre Norton), "Walker Between The Planes" (Gordon R. Dickson), "The Crayfish" (Helen Arvonen), "Oh Say, Can You See?" (Erik van Lhin), "Unmistakably Henry" (Jean Cavrell), "Call Me Million" (Frederik Pohl), "Teddy Bear" (James E. Gunn) and "Last Night And Every Night" (James Tiptree Jr.) // (all that lot from Locus. You may read here some item you also read in the last issue of NN. This is because I am one of the few regular readers of NN who didn't get to see the tenth issues. No reason, just our policy.) // OCCULT No. 2 (75¢, 128 pages) from Popular Library is in the same format as the SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOKS (which are/were annuals), but appears quarterly (it says). The contents are not of great interest to the science fiction fan, but the inside covers are Finlay reprints. And maybe it indicates a change in policy on the part of Popular Library. Not in policy towards layout, though: that has hardly changed at all in fifteen years.

OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS:: The issue numbered 334-336 of Miron Grindea's ADAM International Review is devoted to the Moon, and all that stuff. // Some of the more, ah, outspoken SF writers in England have taken to the very little mags. One such magazine is PRIPUS, the nineteenth issue of which contained two poems - "Oryx in Phoenix" and "What we have here" - written by James Blish and John Brunner respectively. The eighteenth issue had a section (titled "Living:Being:Having") from Aldiss's BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD. // The very same B.W. Aldiss has a four page article in the April 1970 issue of LONDON MAGAZINE. Title is "SF Serious, Popular and S&S". I think you can work out what that is about. There's a reference to 'Paul Anderson', but Azimov's name was spelled correctly. // The April 1970 issue of EKISTICS (sort of must reading for authors) is a special devoted to 'ECOSYSTEMS: MAN AND NATURE'. // The Times Lit. Supp. for July 9 has about a half page of reviews of SF books. The reviewer, in dealing with Ballard's THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION, remarks that he prefers Ballard's earlier work. In a more recent issue of NEW STATESMAN the reviewer is rather more candid, referring to THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION as "stunningly pretentious". So much for the wider appeal of New Wave SF. // An earlier issue of the TLS ran a quite favourable review of Langdon Jones's version of TITUS ALONE - but so far as I know Penguin printed the earlier version. // The July 1970 SOVIET LITERATURE prints a seven-page interview with Ivan Yefremov. It doesn't contain much that is specific. // The June issue of BOOKS & BOOKMEN has a two page report on the British Eastercon (EXTREMELY ARTICULATE PEOPLE: Report on SciCon '70) by 'Robert Ray' (there's a familiar name). I thought you had some pull with B&B, Pato. (Thanks, Mike O'Brien and Lee Harding for some of the above.) // The June 26 issue of NEW STATESMAN has a rambling full-page article which might be said to be about SF, headed Here Come the Consies. The article wanders through the author's reminiscences about SF magazines, to JWCJr and Jakobson's attack on him of a couple of months (well, nearly a year) ago, back to the Dean Drive, on to DUNE ('a brilliantly conceived ecological epic' (huh?)) and to MAKE ROOM, MAKE ROOM, THE SPACE MERCHANTS (whence the 'Consies', for conservationists) and the final revelation that the ecology bit is all a right wing plot. Hell, and all this time I thought the pollution was a right-wing plot. // (This column could be run more often, if readers are interested: I don't exactly rush to print the items, though.....)

THE APA CORNER:: S&PS 92 - 144 pages, and holding at 23 or 24 members. Apa-L 265 - 124 pages. FAPA postmailings to the 131st FAPA mailing - 16 pages so far.

Mail Dates:: Mail received steadily to June 18 from New York. Mail received extremely irregularly to June 12 from Los Angeles. Make that very extremely irregularly...

CONNOTATIONS:: All sorts of Westcon reports are to hand, but the blow is taken mainly from WINNIE 48 (Mike Ward, Box 41, Menlo Park, California 94025, \$1 for 6 issues) and from Fred Patton's Westcon newszine, THE CHRONION. // The most interesting result for Australians was probably the fact that Dimitrii Rezuvaov won two awards in the Art Show, in the Heroic Fantasy section with "Come Follow Me..." and he also won the Most Promising New Artist Award. Onward to the heights! // Westcon registration was about 625 with attendance 100 or so less than that. The 1971 Westcon will be in San Francisco and the '72 Westcon at Long Beach. The hotel, averaging out the reports, seems to have been well above average (and I have to admit that I am relying upon Don Fitch's FROM SUNDAY TO SATURDAY....). // Australian fans may be interested to know that the Westcon showed about 18 hours of movie a day for the first three days, but most of the movies were rather older than those shown at Australian conventions. "5000 Fingers of Dr. T." would have been the best of the films shown. Two fan movies (or rather, rushes thereof) were also shown: Michael Kurland/Randall Garrett's GOOM and Dave McDaniel's Thrush training film, MINIMAL ASSAULT SERIES No. 18: SECURING THE ISOLATED OBJECTIVE. How about that, Clarke fans? (Ron L. Clarke fans, that is). // The skinnydipping could prove troublesome at an Australian convention. And besides, Australian fans..... // GET RIGHT TO THE SOURCE: GO TO WORCESTER IN '71! Pete Weston asked me to put in a word or so for the 22nd British SF Convention, to be held at Exeter 1971 in Worcester. I should think that Australian fans should make a special effort to support this convention. Registration is 10/-, made payable to "22nd British Science Fiction Convention" and this should be sent to Peter R. Weston, 31 Pinowall Avenue, Birmingham 30, UK. // Yes, gentle reader, there will be an Australian SF Convention next year. Melbourne, January 1 & 2, and maybe 3. Details will be announced any moment now. //

HEICON PLANS Here are fuller details of the Heicon coverage you will get in Australian fanzines. There will be a special issue of NN on August 24 or 25, depending on how quickly the news gets through. Then, about a week later, Gary Mason will publish an issue of THE NEW FORERUNNER giving more details. Finally, after Robin Johnson's return, the next issue of AUSTRALIA IN '75 will be devoted to a report of the Heicon Business Session (but maybe with some lighter material). Response to the most recent issue of AUSTRALIA IN '75 has been described as 'modest'.

CLUB NEWS:: On July 18 a meeting of the SSFF, the FSS and the ASFS was held at the home of Laura Molesworth, consisting of a discussion of HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION and a few films. Please don't ask what all those initials stand for. // The first meeting of the MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY will be held on August 7, 8pm, at the home of Tony Thomas, 1/108 Millsyn Street South Yarra. (Not far from Domain Road) Don't forget it.

AUSTRALIAN FANZINES:: Times are lean, and only NN seems to have made an appearance during July (SOMERSET G.ZETTE aside). Next month should be better, with the 12th ANZAPA mailing to load off.

FANZINES:: Bruce Gillespie (PO Box 245, Ararat, Vic 3377) is Agent for LOCUS, which is a pretty good bargain @ 30¢ a copy and 8-12 pages of news every fortnight or more often. // Now about

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, let me say that while some of you out there have subscribed, there are many who haven't. Why wait until SFR is a double Hugo winner? Get on the bandwagon now, at 50¢ a copy. Subscribe for as many issues as you want. You can easily allow me to drop these frantic cries by subscribing in sufficiently large numbers. Send the money to me, then pray.

BOOK NOTES:: The latest Russian SF I have is HORSEMEN FROM NOWHERE by Abramov and Abramov (Mir Publishers, 1969), and definitely a superior piece of work. It takes a problem (the confrontation with aliens) and deals with it carefully. There is a lot of junky science, but that happens to be beside the point. If you should come across a copy, don't hesitate to buy it. (my hardcover copy cost 80¢) // In September Ballantine will issue a quality pb edition of something called THE LORD OF THE RINGS for about \$8 a set. Frankly I can't see a book or set of books with an outlandish title like that selling many copies at all. // Mike O'Brien thanked me for the publicity for C. RANDAITH and Tolkien. He disguised it a little, to tell the truth. //

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CoA:: Gary Mason, 8-14 Warilli Road, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086.
SHORTER WINS TAFF! (Shorter - 142 votes, Rotsler - 78 votes, Brown - 48 votes) (Stiles August VISION Just arrived - dedicated to HEICON. A beautiful cover by Eddie Jones. Inside backcover is a blue/white of the cover of the first SWORDS & SORcery. More details next time. SFC 14 just out - mainly letters and reviews. More news on it in the next NN. The first issue of NORSTRILIAN REVIEWS comes for free.

n o r s t r i l i a n r e v i e w s

number one

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RUNESMITH by Harlan Ellison and Theodore Sturgeon
(F&SF, May 1970, page 31)

Bruce Gillespie

This story attracts notice because it is "Dedicated to the Memory of Cordwainer Smith". However the reader will be hard put to find the influence of Cordwainer Smith in the story - or at least not the Cordwainer Smith I know.

Indeed, the story is almost a catalogue of un-Smithish procedures (if the editor will permit me such a word). There's the ubiquitous name, of course, but then there's plenty of other Smiths in the woodpile. The "hero" of this story is named Smith; he "crouches in the darkness on the 102nd floor" and he flees from an angry mob who are making their way up the stairs of an empty Empire State Building. Therefore the story is not set in Cordwainer Smith's universe of the Instrumentality, and makes me wonder just what Ellison and Sturgeon had in mind when they wrote the story.

There is an air of fear and absurdity which also does not remind me of Smith's stories. RUNESMITH is clogged with one line paragraphs like: "He had done it before, and destroyed the world." Zowie. So what? Place against that breathtaking statement the excruciating detail of the rest of the story's beginning:

" Terrible screams. Small creatures with things growing inside them, pushing their vital organs out of alignment, then out through the skin. Watery screams."

I may be wrong, but I don't think there's any writing in Smith's stories as literal and sadistic as that.

And the cliches! This is the point where RUNESMITH completely parts company with its dedication. Almost every line of the story contains words as vague as "things growing..." and "terrible screams...". In one paragraph picked at random, I read "terror and joy", "a-borning" and "something alive". Cordwainer Smith breathed new life into old words; those writers snuff the breath from those words they do use.

The "hero" Smith's mysterious power comes from the black arts, but the black arts were never part of Smith's vocabulary, except sometimes as side references. I doubt whether Smith would ever have written about a character so completely dependent on so trivial a support.

Worse still, these black arts form the mechanism of the story. In a vaguely-explained experiment, the "hero" has managed to destroy the whole world with these black arts. Even worse (if possible), Ellison and Sturgeon relate in detail the snappy conversation between a nixie and an incubus, who have bred Smith through "twelve generations" to destroy the world and let the Underworld take it over.

What other entertainments are provided? Oh yes, Smith has allowed himself to become the victim of these deathly boring devils because he has not slept during his whole life. Finally he succumbs to sleep and - whoopee! - defeats the horrible mob. You can almost hear Cordwainer Smith heaving in horror at the story's last paragraph:

" There was sun now. For the first time. Because he wanted sun. And he wanted cool breezes. And the scent of good things in the air.. Perhaps it would be better now."
The story certainly could "be better now".

I may be wrong, but I suspect that this story represents a complete misunderstanding of Cordwainer Smith's work. For instance, the authors drag in a Latin "perfect square". The hero inscribes it on parchment and hides it in his shoe. There is a surface obscurity in the beginning of the story, instead of Cordwainer Smith's precise ambiguities. Although they would never admit it, RUNESMITH is an insult to Cordwainer Smith because it interprets his work as a trivial facade instead of the complexity it is.

On the other hand, RUNESMITH may be a cheap con trick, using Cordwainer Smith's name where no comparisons were intended. I hope neither writer would stoop so low.

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John Foyster

It is worth noting that Smith's best-known story, SCANNERS LIVE IN VAIN, had as protagonist one Martel (or Smith, if you like) who destroyed the known world to replace it with a new and less cruel one. But this first story was a work in which the author was turning out from himself towards the world, not a case of introversion, as is the case with RUNESMITH (if the the reference is not to Ballard's MAN ON THE 99TH FLOOR, then the authors have been careless).

There is one respect in which RUNESMITH is most unlike the stories of Cordwainer Smith, and that is in the language employed. Both Mr. Ellison and Mr. Sturgeon believe in using 'English as she is spoke' - a sort of snobbish notion of the jargon used by the masses. Thus, the sentences "He's gotta be up there" and "Now we got 'im" are typical of the authors of RUNESMITH, but most atypical of Cordwainer Smith, who remembered that he was writing a story which goes down onto paper and which is read. "gotta", for example, is a bad writer's funny hat: that is why Smith wouldn't use it. To write in pulp style means to get away with murder - perhaps even more so now when the emphasis in some fields is on language degradation rather than enrichment.

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Comments to Bruce Gillespie, PO Box 245, Ararat Victoria 3377, Australia. (except for you, BMPA). NR will stand in for JOE for a few months, for the next issue of the latter will not be published until 1971. 28/7/1970